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SUBJECT: NINEWA: PROVINCIAL CHIEF OF POLICE CONFIRMS SECTARIAN STRIFE
IN TAL AFAR

MOSUL 00000051 001.2 OF 002

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) Provincial Chief of Police Wathiq al-Qudir confirms recent violence in the western Ninewa city of Tal Afar is due to sectarian strife. President Bush mentioned Tal Afar in a speech this year as a beacon of hope after successful counterinsurgency efforts last September helped bring stability to the area. Al-Qudir claims Shia police officers, presumably taking orders from the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad, are behind the attacks on Sunnis. Incidents range from bogus arrests and detentions, to outright physical aggression. Al-Qudir says Shia and Sunni violence and intimidation in Tal Afar is forcing Sunni families to seek safety with friends and relatives in Mosul, and estimates the number of those fleeing might be more than 2,000. Security forces in the area believe the latest violence is in retaliation for Sunni attacks on Shia markets on April 21 and May 9. End Summary.

SECTARIAN STRIFE IN TAL AFAR CAUSING SUNNIS TO FLEE

¶2. (S) Provincial Chief of Police (PCOP) Wathiq al-Qudir confirmed recent violence in the western city of Tal Afar was caused by sectarian strife. Al-Qudir told PRT Deputy Team Leader and PolOff on May 20 that recent attacks against Sunnis were caused by Shia-dominated police officers presumably taking orders from the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad. He also accused Shia police of fabricating evidence to arrest and detain Sunnis. Many Shia officers had been intimidating and, in certain cases, physically harming their Sunni victims, he said. Al-Qudir said Shia and Sunni violence and intimidation in the area was forcing thousands of Sunni families to flee to safety in Mosul. Al-Qudir estimated there were more than 2,000 Sunni families that had left Tal Afar over the past few weeks, but that the number was not yet confirmed. He said he would compile the exact number of displaced persons in a formal report to be submitted to the central government by the end of May. He said those leaving Tal Afar were not living in camps, but rather staying with family and friends in Mosul. During a recent

public television broadcast earlier in the week al-Qudir asked all fleeing families to register with his office.

13. (S) Al-Qudir's comments confirmed lingering suspicions from several sources that incidents of violence in Tal Afar were sparked by a suicide attack at a predominantly Shia market on April 21, and a suicide vehicle bombing at another Shia market on May 9. According to security forces operating in the area, an Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQIZ) memorandum recently captured outlined a strategy to create a sectarian civil war in the city. This memorandum, they believed, might have incited the attacks on the markets. The sources claimed these events might have led to retaliatory attacks by Shia police on a Sunni hospital, as well as recent incidents of intimidation and aggression. On May 11 Ninewa Provincial Council Chair Salem Haj Issa told PRT DTL that during a visit to Tal Afar a few days before he received word from city councilmembers that Shia police officers had been harassing Sunnis. And members of the Iraqi Islamic Party told PRT officials on May 18 that conflict between Sunnis and Shia was impacting security in the area. They called on Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces to help control the problem.

SEEKING HELP FROM FRIENDS

14. (S) Chief of Police al-Qudir and Iraqi Army (IA) 2nd Division General Jamaal said they were working with IA 3rd Division General Khorshed (whose area of operation was in western Ninewa) to resolve the situation. Al-Qudir said the problem ultimately rested with his office, but he was relying on his security forces colleagues for assistance. Al-Qudir and Jamaal admitted they had gone public many times over the past few months claiming there was no sectarian violence in Ninewa, especially Tal Afar, but said they did so to pacify the public. However, both men claimed remorse for the misleading statements, and that the time had come to "speak the truth."

MOSUL 00000051 002.2 OF 002

COMMENT

15. (C) Al-Qudir's words match recent statements from several sources that ethnic tensions in Tal Afar are heating up. While there are friction points between Shia and Sunni in the city, PRT contacts believe the recent violence is caused by outside actors attempting to take advantage of an already tenuous situation in Tal Afar. Groups such as AQIZ appear to be exploiting historical tensions between Sunnis and Shia to destroy any goodwill that resulted after successful counterinsurgency efforts by Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces there last fall. Al-Qudir believes problems in the area might also be caused by events in Baghdad and the lack of a central government.

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